

ART. XX.—Is *Eucalyptus fruticetorum*, F. v. M., identical
with *E. polybractea*, R. T. Baker?

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Communicated by Professor A. J. Ewart.

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In this *Journal* xxvi. (New Series), p. 148, is a paper "On *Eucalyptus polybractea*, R. T. Baker," by Mr. Baker, in which he gives an account of my endeavours, with imperfect material, some of it of dubious origin, to ascertain the identity of *E. fruticetorum*, F.v.M. Mr. Baker ceased his researches with the year 1910, ending with an imperfect reference to my *Crit. Rev. Eucalyptus*, ii., 40-41.

The actual reference

"On the occasion of a recent (July, 1903) visit to the Melbourne Herbarium I came upon an excellent specimen, bearing a label, entirely in Mueller's handwriting, as follows:—*Eucalyptus fruticetorum*, F. v. M., Lower Avoca (*Wedderburn*) Scrub. W. Percy Wilkinson, 1892."

I had never seen it before, although I had worked on Wilkinson's specimens labelled by the late Mr. J. G. Luehmann, and transmitted by that gentleman to Sydney, and it had probably been mislaid (with many other specimens) in the confusion which took place after Mueller's death. I shall fully figure it in my "Forest Flora of New South Wales" in due course, and it is identical in every respect with type specimens of *E. polybractea*, R. T. Baker.

The type specimen seems to have been lost. I made a personal search in the Melbourne Herbarium for it, with the kind help of Professor Ewart; and no trace of it can be found at Kew, so Colonel Prain is good enough to tell me. There is no good reason to doubt the correctness of Mueller's determination of this characteristic specimen of his own species."

I was not able to carry out my promise as regards my "Forest Flora of New South Wales" until Part XLII, 28 (1911), through circumstances beyond my control, but no one has been prejudiced in any way by the delay.

The twig of *E. fruticetorum* F.v.M. that I depicted at Plate 156 of my *Forest Flora* was faithfully drawn, as anyone can see by referring to the original in the Melbourne Herbarium.

Mr. Baker (*op. cit.* p. 148) states that he was shown a specimen bearing Mueller's label, "*E. fruticetorum*," but does not quote the further particulars on that label. Perhaps it was Mr. W. Percy Wilkinson's specimen. I repeat that that specimen was labelled by Mueller *E. fruticetorum* in 1892. I further say that this specimen is identical with a plant which Mr. Baker believed to be new in 1900, and named by him *E. polybractea*.

If these two statements of mine are wrong, Mr. Baker should point out the error or errors, and I will gladly withdraw them. I have bestowed much care on the elucidation of Mueller's *E. fruticetorum*, and, since 1908 believe that finality has been attained.

At p. 149 Mr. Baker says Mueller's description of *E. fruticetorum* is too meagre upon which to place any systematic work, yet at p. 150 he assumes (parallel columns) that the contrary is the case.

I have done my very best to ascertain the species-names of the older workers in Eucalypts, and have revived more than one name from unmerited oblivion.

Having found Mueller's *fruticetorum* (not the type, for that is lost, but the next best thing, a specimen certified by the describer), all the previous surmises, founded on imperfect and even doubtful material, give way (as far as I am concerned) to my latest pronouncement. A botanist has a right, like any other person, to be judged by his latest decision.

Mr. Baker's criticism is entirely negative as regards *E. fruticetorum*; he does not make a single suggestion as to what it may be, but leaves it a name, in spite of Mueller's own identification of it.

In passing, let me say that one must not apply the microscope too closely to the descriptions of Eucalyptus species by the older botanists. (Surely the same thing applies to other groups of plants and animals). One must try and find out what they meant; what they did not mean is less important. On more than one occasion when in conversation I confronted Mueller with difficulties of this kind, he gave his ruling, and added, "We must read descriptions philosophically"—a favourite word of his.

He obtained a great acquisition of Eucalyptus material at the time he wrote the description of *E. fruticetorum*, namely, during the writing of the second volume of the *Fragmenta*. The confusion he made with his *E. hemiphloia* (see *Fragm.* ii. 62, and also my *Crit. Rev.* ii., 14), is an extreme case.

Smith confused both his *E. resinifera* and *S. piperita*, but years afterwards, Smith being dead, and the types lost, Bentham

gave his interpretation of them, without introducing an additional name, and no one has ever disputed his decision. He has not even a Smith-named specimen, type or no type. I could give other examples.

Mr. Baker, at p. 151, points out that the Blue Mallee of Victoria (Inglewood, etc.), and of New South Wales (Wyalong) are identical, which is what I pointed out in my "Forest Flora of New South Wales," in 1911. Indeed, I have also shown that it extends to South Australia.

To Mr. Baker's appeal to drop the name *fruticetorum* because some distillers are selling its oil under the name *E. polybractea*, I have nothing to say, except that our efforts should be in the direction of ascertaining the correct name as regards every species. The correct name, when ascertained, will stand for all time, and the sooner such is ascertained the sooner we shall arrive at stability of nomenclature, which is surely the aim of all careful taxonomists.